

USAGI

YOJIMBO

No. 33

\$2.25
(\$2.75 in
Canada)



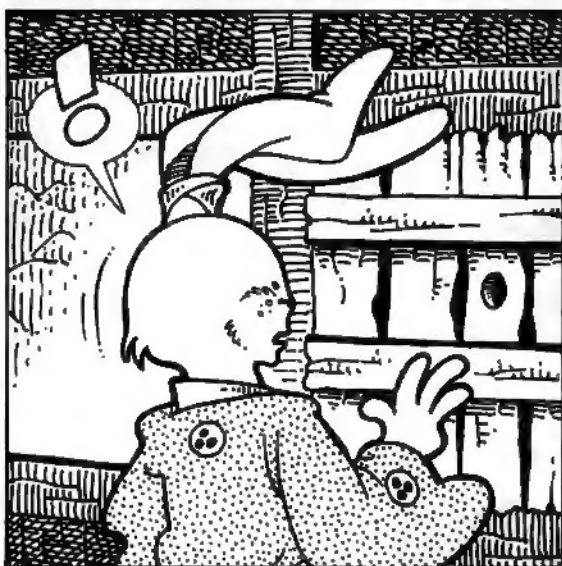
FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

BROKEN RITUAL



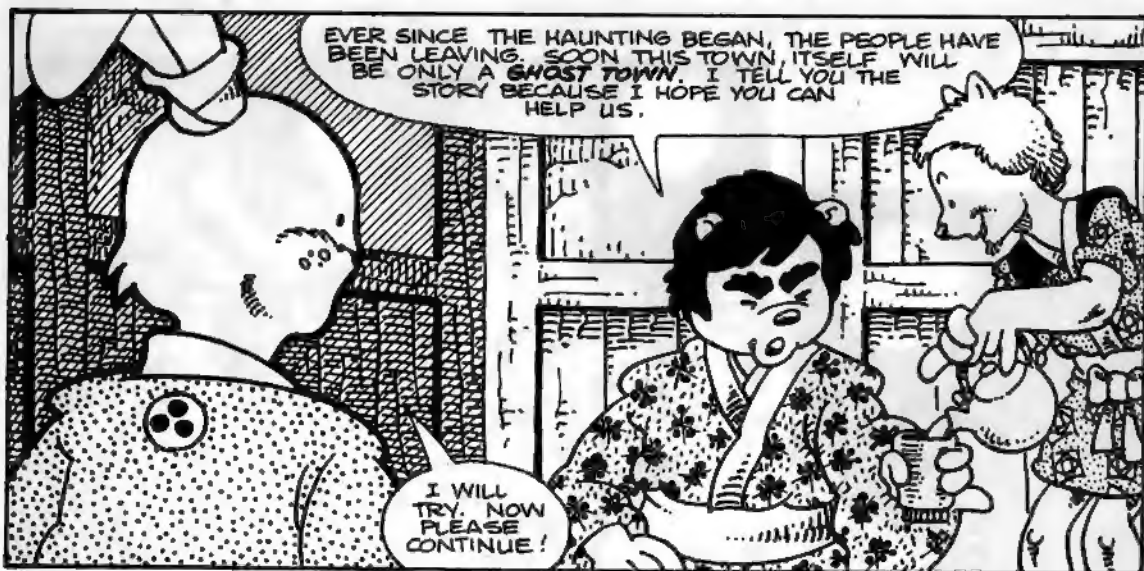












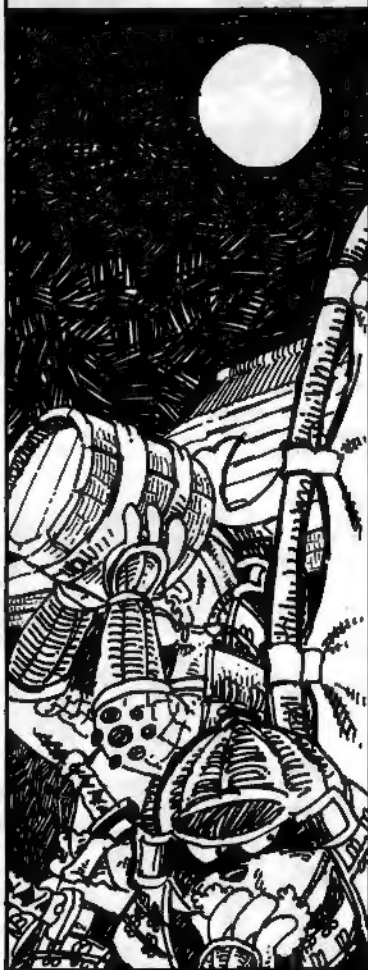
"MUCH OF THE STORY YOU ALREADY KNOW. LORD HIKKI WAS THE VICTOR AT THE BATTLE OF ADACHI PLAIN, FORCING LORD MIFUNE'S SAMURAI TO SCATTER THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRYSIDE.



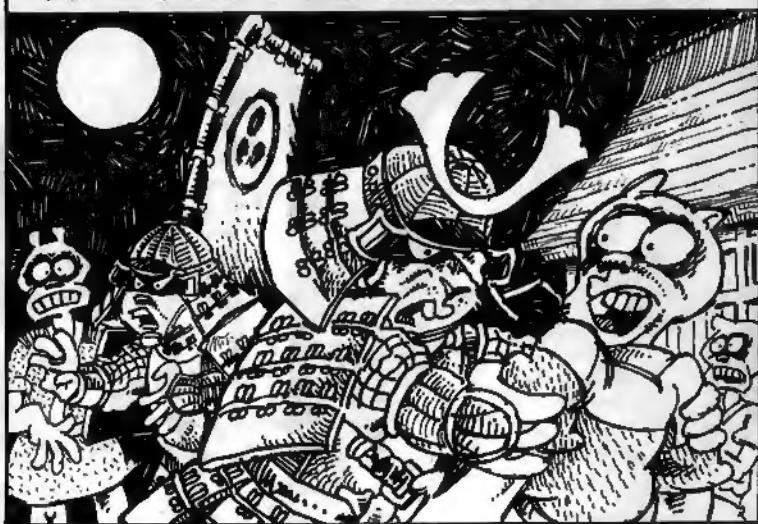
"GENERAL TADAOKA, WITH A YOUNG LIEUTENANT, MADE IT TO THIS VILLAGE, PURSUED CLOSELY BY THE ENEMY. A BANDAGE COVERED HALF HIS FACE. I HEARD LATER AN ARROW HAD PIERCED INTO HIS EYE.



"I REMEMBER THAT NIGHT WELL. THE MOON WAS FULL AND LIT THE SCENE IN SHADY DAYLIGHT. FIRST, THEY DEMANDED OUR FOOD AND DRINK AS WAS THEIR RIGHT AND WE GAVE THEM WHAT LITTLE WE HAD.



"THEN THEY TRIED TO ORGANIZE US AGAINST LORD HIKIJI.



"BUT WE ARE JUST PEASANTS—MERCHANTS AND ARTISANS—NOT WARRIORS. WHAT HAD ARMIES TO DO WITH US? ONE LORD WOULD TREAT US JUST AS BADLY AS ANOTHER!



"SO WE ALL HID IN OUR HOMES.



"GENERAL TADAOKA CALLED US COWARDS, TRAITORS AND WORSE BUT WE COULD NOT BE MOVED.



"HIS LIEUTENANT WANTED TO SLAY US ALL-- PUNISHMENT FOR TURNING OUR BACKS TO THEM-- BUT THE GENERAL STOPPED HIM."



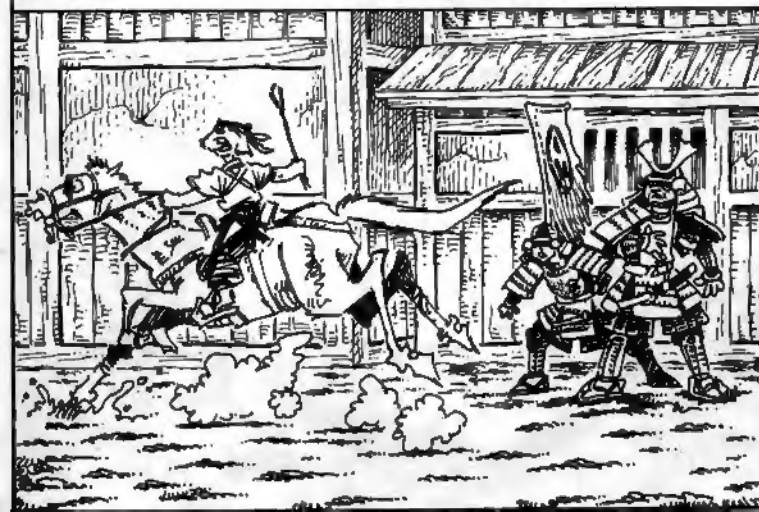
"THE LIEUTENANT FELL TO HIS KNEES. IT MUST BE DIFFICULT TO BE SO YOUNG AND KNOW YOU MAY SOON BE DEAD."



"SUDDENLY, A RIDER CAME THROUGH TOWN."



"LORD MIFUNE IS DEAD! LORD MIFUNE IS DEAD!" HE CRIED. "LORD HIKINI HOLDS HIS CASTLE!"



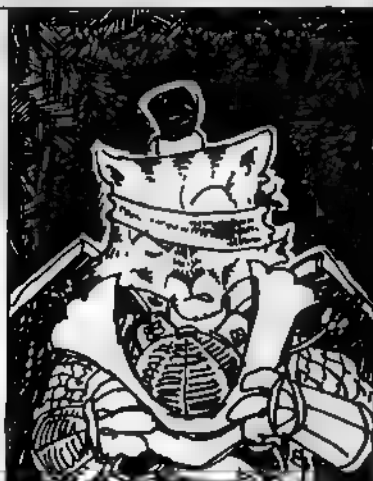
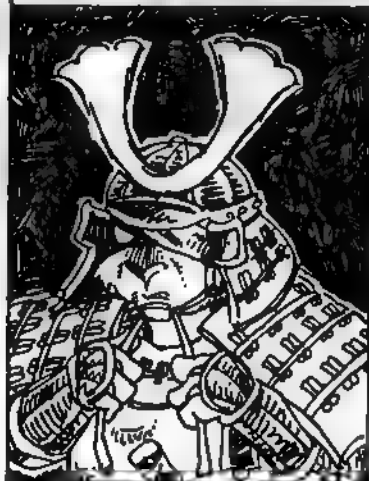
"HE RODE OUT OF TOWN AS SUDDENLY AS HE ARRIVED-- A PHANTOM OF THE DUST."



"I WAS CLOSE ENOUGH TO SEE THE GENERAL'S FACE THEN. IT MADE THE SWEAT RUN COLD DOWN MY SPINE.



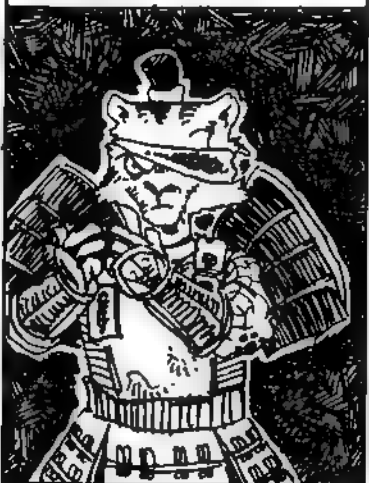
"HE REMOVED HIS KABUTO SLOWLY, REVERENTLY-- AS IF HE HAD ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD--AS IF THE ENEMY WERE NOT BARKING AT HIS HEELS.



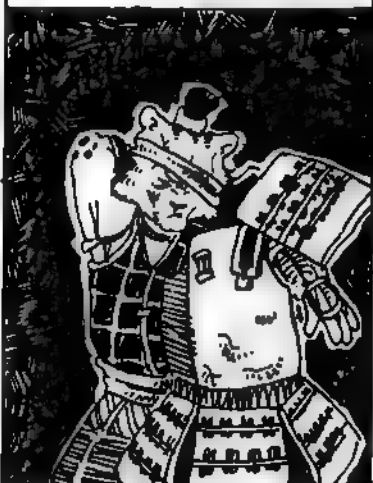
"CONTINUING THOSE SAME REVERENT MOTIONS, HE UNLID HIS TACHI (LONG SWORD) AND DIRK.



"THEN HE UNTIED HIS BELT, HIS WAIST CORD AND SHOULDER CORDS.



"HE TOOK OFF HIS CUIRASS AND SHOULDER GUARDS...



"...FOLLOWED BY HIS UNDER-ARMOR PADDING AND SLEEVES.



"THEN HE SAT ON THE DIRT. HE CLOSED HIS EYES FOR A MINUTE... THEN PLACED HIS DIRK DOWN IN FRONT OF HIM.



"I SAW THE LIEUTENANT SWALLOW THEN SLOWLY NOD IN UNDERSTANDING.



"SEPPUKU. I HAD HEARD OF THE RITUAL BUT NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD WITNESS IT. RATHER THAN FACE THE SHAME OF CAPTURE HE WOULD FOLLOW LORD MIFUNE INTO DEATH.



"HE WOULD SHOW US ALL HOW A SAMURAI DIES.



"I STOOD TRANSFIXED BEHIND THE SAFETY OF MY WALLS.



"FIRST, THE CUT ACROSS THE STOMACH, LEFT TO RIGHT.



"THEN THE CUT UPWARD.



"I SAW THE LIEUTENANT-- SAW THE FEAR IN HIS EYES. HIS SWEATING HANDS TIGHTENED THEIR GRIP IN ANTICIPATION OF DELIVERING THE DEATH STROKE-- OF SEVERING HIS LEADER'S HEAD. THE GENERAL NODDED-- THEN ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE!



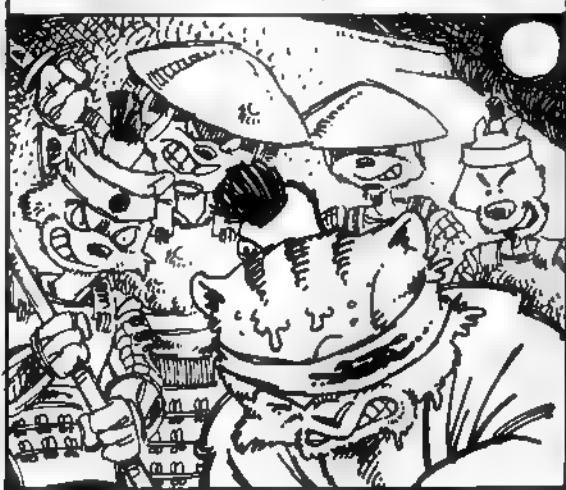
"HIKIMI'S MEN HAD FOUND THEM. THE LIEUTENANT RAN--BUT NOT FAR



"INCREDIBLY, GENERAL TADAOKA, IN HIS PAIN, AGAIN SNATCHED UP HIS DIRK AND ATTEMPTED TO MAKE THE FINAL CUT BUT THE BLADE WAS WRENCHED FROM HIS HANDS.



"THEY WERE ASHIGARU, COMMON FOOT SOLDIERS, AND WHEN THEY SAW THE FAMOUS GENERAL HELPLESS BEFORE THEM, THEY LAUGHED.



"LOTS WERE DRAWN TO SEE WHICH OF THEM WOULD HAVE THE HONOR OF KILLING THEIR PRIZE AND THUS INSURE THE REWARDS AND REPUTATION FOR HIMSELF AND HIS DESCENDANTS.



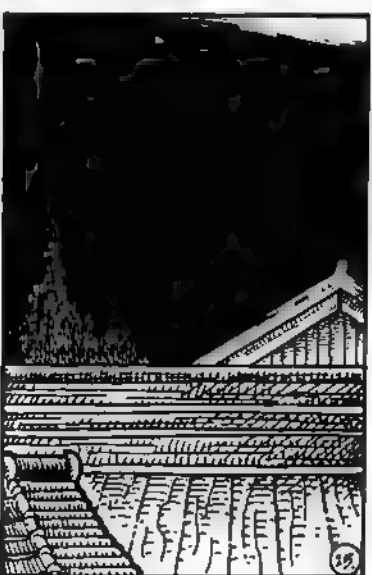
"THE GENERAL WAS A FEARSOME WARRIOR AND EVEN THOUGH HE WAS INCAPACITATED, I COULD SEE THE FEAR IN HIS EXECUTIONER'S EYES. THE MAN WAS DYING BUT THE LEGEND WAS STILL ALL TOO REAL.



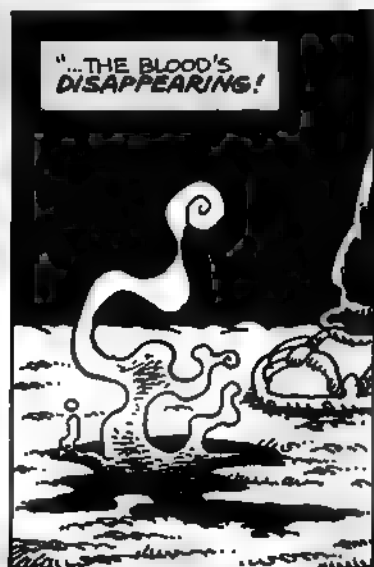
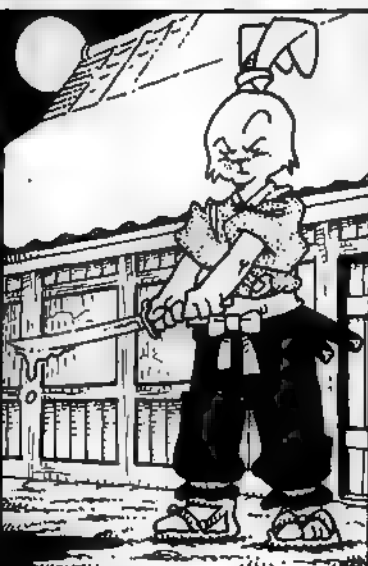
"SUDDENLY, HE GAVE A SINGLE ENGLISH-FILLED SCREAM WHICH FILLED EVERYONE WHO HEARD IT WITH A BLOOD CHILLING DREAD..."







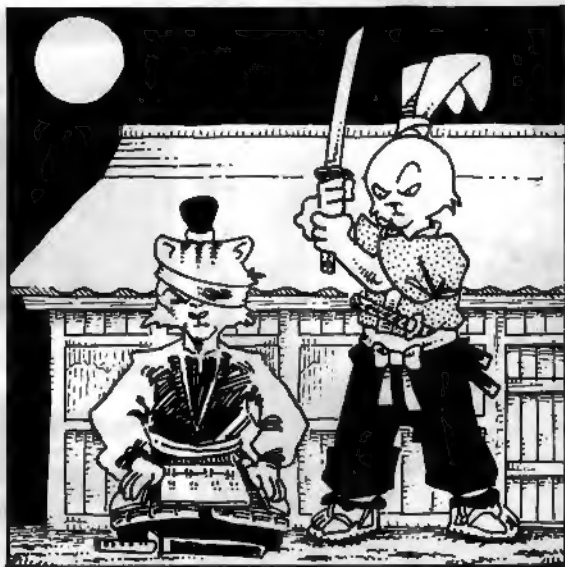
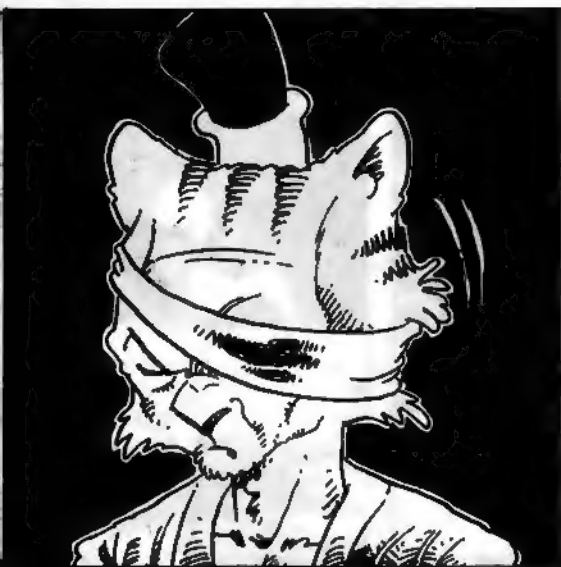




GENERAL TADAOKA, I
AM MIYAMOTO USAGI. MY
FAMILY HAS BEEN RETAINERS
TO THE MIFUNE CLAN FOR
GENERATIONS.

I, MYSELF, SERVED AS
LORD MIFUNE'S PERSONAL
BODYGUARD DURING THE
GREAT WARS.

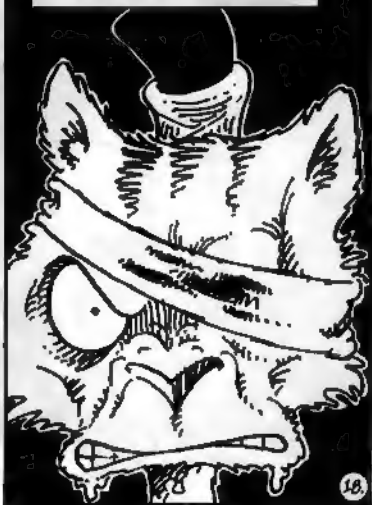
IT WOULD
BE MY
HONOR TO
ACT AS
YOUR
SECOND.



"THE FIRST CUT..."



"THE SECOND CUT..."



"THE HEAD DIPS..."



THE GENERAL'S
GONE--AND THERE WAS
NO SCREAM.

AND
THERE NEVER
WILL BE
AGAIN.

THE
HAUNTING
IS OVER?
HOW?

NO MATTER
HOW GREAT A WARRIOR'S
RENOWN, AN UNWORTHY
DEATH IS A LASTING
SHAME. TO BE SLAIN
BY SOME NAMELESS
SUBORDINATE WITH
NO FAMILY HISTORY
BROUGHT DISHONOR
TO THE TADAOKA
NAME.

I
COMPLETED
THE RITUAL
AS IT SHOULD
HAVE BEEN.

SO
GENERAL
TADAOKA'S
SPIRIT WILL
SUFFER NO
MORE.

NOW IF ALL
THE MEN OF WAR
WERE SO
FORTUNATE.

SCANNED
BY

REVIEW